

Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-02

INFO OCT-01 IO-01 ISO-00 /004 R

66011

DRAFTED BY:EA:VLC:BSKIRKPATRICK

APPROVED BY:EA:VLC:JDROSENTHAL

----- 017998

R 150148Z JUL 76

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

INFO USMISSION GENEVA 0000

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 175035

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM FROM BANGKOK DATED JUNE 25, 1976
SENT SECSTATE WASHDC INFO HONG KONG, PARIS, RANGOON, VIENTIANE,
CINCPAC HONOLULU IS REPEATED TO YOU: QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 18603

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR CB TH

SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAIS VISIT TO CAMBODIA

REF: A) BANGKOK 17872 B) BANGKOK 18086 C) BANGKOK A-94 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: THE MEETING IN SISOPHON JUNE 16-17 WAS A GENTLY
SESSION, DURING WHICH FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAIR MADE A CONSCIOUS
EFFORT TO AVOID CONTROVERSY. DESPITE PUBLIC OPTIMISM, RTG
WORKING LEVEL OFFICIALS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT EMBASSIES WILL BE
REOPENED AND AMBASSADORS EXCHANGED FOR SOME TIME. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY HAS REPORTED BASIC DECISIONS MADE DURING THE JUNE 16-17
MEETING IN SISOPHON BETWEEN A THAI DELEGATION LED BY FOREIGN
MINISTER PHICHAIR RATTAKUN AND A CAMBODIAN DELEGATION HEADED BY
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER IENG SARY (REF A), AS WELL AS TRANSMITTED
PHICHAIR'S PRESS CONFERENCE OF JUNE 18 (REF B). PURPOSE OF THIS
MESSAGE IS TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL DETAILS ON THE MEETING AND OPIN-
IONS OF THEM, WHICH HAVE EMERGED FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH
THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED OR WITH PERSONS CLOSE TO THEM.

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2. EXCHANGE OF AMBASSADORS. ALTHOUGH PHICHAH INDICATED TO CHARGE JUNE 21 THAT ISSUE DEFINITELY MOVING, OTHER SOURCES SAID THAT PHICHAH HAD TO RAISE IT TWICE WITH IENG SARY BEFORE THE LATTER RELUCTANTLY AGREED. IENG SARY NOTED THAT BURMA AND LARGE NUMBER OF OTHER COUNTRIES ALSO WISH TO EXCHANGE DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES AT THIS TIME BUT THAT CAMBODIA IS TOO OCCUPIED WITH INTERNAL PROBLEMS TO DO SO NOW. OFFICIALS WITH WHOM WE SPOKE AGREED THAT REOPENING OF EMBASSIES AND EXCHANGE OF AMBASSADORS WOULD NOT LIKELY OCCUR BEFORE END OF 1976, BEGINNING OF 1977, DESPITE PHICHAH'S ENTHUSIASTIC COMMENTS.

3. REFUGEES. THE CAMBODIANS SAID THEY WANTED THEM BACK, BUT IN REPLY TO THE SUGGESTION THAT UNHCR OPEN UP AN OFFICE IN PHNOM PENH, IENG SARY SAID ONLY THAT HE WOULD DISCUSS IT WITH HIS GOVERNMENT. AN INTERIOR MINISTRY (MOI) OFFICIAL HAS TOLD US THAT WITHOUT A RESIDENT UNHCR STAFF INSIDE CAMBODIA, THAT GOVERNMENT'S GUARANTEES CONCERNING THE SAFETY OF THE REFUGEES WOULD BE WORTHLESS. UPON THEIR RETURN, BOTH MOI AND MFA OFFICIALS BRIEFED THE UNHCR BANGKOK REPRESENTATIVE ON THE DISCUSSIONS ON THIS SUBJECT, ON THE BASIS OF WHICH HE HAS APPARENTLY CONCLUDED THAT NOTHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN. EVEN IF HIS ORGANIZATION WERE ALLOWED TO HAVE A PHNOM PENH OFFICE, HE FINDS IT EXTREMELY UNLIKELY TO BELIEVE IT WOULD HAVE THE FREEDOM TO MOVE AROUND THE COUNTRY TO INSPECT THE CONDITION OF THE RETURNEES. HE WONDERED PRIVATELY WHETHER THIS POINT WAS RAISED IN THE DISCUSSIONS MORE TO ASSUAGE THAI PUBLIC OPINION THAN IN THE EXPECTATION THAT SOMETHING WOULD HAPPEN.

4. BORDER DEMARCATION. SURVEY WORK LEADING TO DEMARCATION OF THE BORDER AROUND TA PHRAYAN WHERE CLASHES BETWEEN THAI AND CAMBODIAN HAVE OCCURRED IN THE PAST, IS EXPECTED TO OCCUR IN THE NEAR FUTURE. AN MOI OFFICIAL HAS TOLD US THAT THE MAF FAVORED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PERMANENT, GENERAL THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER COMMISSION BUT WITHOUT SUCCESS. ALTHOUGH SUCH BODIES EXIST BETWEEN THAILAND AND HER OTHER NEIGHBORS, THIS HAS NEVER BEEN THE CASE WITH CAMBODIA, WHERE THERE WERE PREVIOUSLY ONLY SPECIFIC COMMISSIONS IN SUCH FIELDS AS FORESTRY AND FISHING, HE SAID.

5. TRADE. CAMBODIA MADE IT CLEAR THAT, WHILE TRADE MATTERS ON ITS SIDE ARE TO BE HANDLED BY A STATE COMPANY, IT WISHED TO DEAL WITH

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A PRIVATE FIRM RATHER THAN A STATE FIRM ON THE THAI SIDE, APPARENTLY SUGGESTING THAT THE LATTER HAD MOVED TOO SLOWLY ON THE PREVIOUS SALT DEAL. ALTHOUGH CAMBODIA WISHED TO PURCHASE THAI GOODS AT PREFERENTIAL PRICES, INTERNATIONAL COMMODITY PRICES, WHICH DID NOT GO OVER TOO WELL WITH THE THAI SIDE. TRADE, WHEN IT BEGINS, WILL CONTINUE TO OCCUR ONLY AT THE ARANYAPRATHET-POIPET BORDER POINT. THE QUESTION OF THAILAND PURCHASING THE CAMBODIAN FISH CATCH AT KOH KONG (REF C) WAS NOT RAISED.

6. THAI FISHERMEN. TO THE THAI DELEGATION, IENG SARY APPEARED GENUINELY UNINFORMED ABOUT THE QUESTION OF THAI FISHERMEN IN CAPTIVITY IN CAMBODIA AS WELL AS ABOUT THEIR BOATS , PROMISING TO SEND WORD BACK TO THE RTG BY THE END OF THE MONTH AFTER INVESTIGATING THE MATTER. HIS UNCERTAINTY CAUSED ONE THAI PARTICIPANT TO WONDER WHETHER THE CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT WAS FRAGMENTED, WITH ANOTHER ELEMENT OVER WHICH IENG SARY HAS NO CONTROL, E.G., SECURITY, KEEPING THE THAI LOCKED UP AS IT ALONE SEES FIT. ONE SOURCE NOTED THAT PHICHAI DID NOT PUSH VERY HARD ON THIS ISSUE ONCE HE REALIZED THAT IENG SARY WAS IGNORANT OF IT.

7. AIRPLANES. REPLYING TO PHICHAI'S OFFER TO RETURN TO CAMBODIA A HELICOPTER AND TWO AIR CAMBODGE PLANES, IENG SARY EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION. THE THAI RECEIVED THE EXPRESSION THAT CAMBODIA MAY ACTUALLY RECLAIM THE HELICOPTER FIRST OF ALL.

8. IENG SARY COMMENTS. THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER EMPHASIZED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT IS CONCENTRATING ON INTERNAL MATTERS, PARTICULARLY AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT. HE ALSO EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION FOR KEEPING PLANS FOR THIS MEETING SECRET, PRESUMABLY FOR SECURITY REASONS (SO FAR AS THE THAI CAN FIGURE). ONE MFA OFFICIAL ADMITTED TO US THAT FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN'S VERBOSITY SKEWERED PLANS FOR A MEETING WITH IENG SARY WHICH HAD BEEN PROJECTED FOR FEBRUARY 27.

9. PARTICIPANTS. THE ONLY NEW FACE ON THE CAMBODIAN SIDE WAS THE PERSON DESCRIBED AS THEIR MFA UNDERSECRETARY, EA CHHON OR IEK CHHON. UNFORTUNATELY, THE THAI DID NOT SEEM CERTAIN OF HIS NAME NOR DID THEY LEARN ANYTHING ABOUT HIS PAST. FORMER CAMBODIAN AMBASSADOR TO PEKING TOCH KHAM DOEUN MADE HIS FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCE IN MONTHS, SEEMINGLY EXTREMELY TIRED. POST WILL BE SUBMITTING AVAILABLE BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON THE CAMBODIAN

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PARTICIPANTS TO INR/OIL-B.

10. COMMENT. THIS MEETING WAS CLEARLY REGARDED BY PHICHAI AS A GET-ACQUAINTED SESSION. HE PURPOSELY AVOIDED SUCH CONTROVERSIAL OR SENSITIVE ISSUES AS OFFERING AID TO CAMBODIA OR CAMBODIAN SUPPORT FOR THE THAI INSURGENCY IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN A CORDIAL ATMOSPHERE, ACCORDING TO HIS COLLEAGUES. THEY CLAIM THAT HIS STRATEGY IS TO WAIT UNTIL RELATIONS HAVE FURTHER IMPROVED, PARTICULARLY BEFORE HITTING THEM WITH THE CT ISSUE. OBVIOUSLY, RELATIONS REMAIN DELICATE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, BUT THE THAI ARE GOING TO HAVE TO POSE THE MORE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AT SOME POINT IF THERE IS TO BE REAL SUBSTANCE TO THE RELATIONSHIP. MASTERS UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, MINISTERIAL VISITS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, DIPLOMATIC MISSION OPENING
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 15 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976STATE175035
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: EA:VLC:BSKIRKPATRICK
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760272-0843
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760754/aaaabvqm.tel
Line Count: 167
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 BANGKOK 17872, 76 BANGKOK 18086, 76 BANGKOK A-94
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 APR 2004 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <17 AUG 2004 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHA'S VISIT TO CAMBODIA
TAGS: PFOR, CB, TH, (PHICHA RATTAKUN)
To: GENEVA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006